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OPEN LETTER TO W. GERMAN WORKERS

The German people are confronted today by the choice of three paths, the Socialist Unity Party of the GDR stated in an open letter to all West German workers published on April 17th. The open letter summarised the three paths as follows:

1. The Path of War

This path would be taken if one of the German states attempted to conquer the other: this would lead to a frightful civil war, and to nuclear world war. This path must be unacceptable to the German people.

2. The Path of Deepening the Division of Germany

The letter named the aim of the present West German Government: if they cannot rule over the whole of Germany, then they wish Germany to remain partitioned. If the two German states cannot come to an understanding on even the first steps towards reunification, then 20 or 30 years may be lost before unity becomes possible.

3. The Path of Understanding

This path would be taken if the workers in East Germany and West Germany reached an understanding, and thus, by joint struggle, achieved an understanding between the two German states. This could be done on the basis of a national compromise, satisfactory not only for the workers, but also for other classes.

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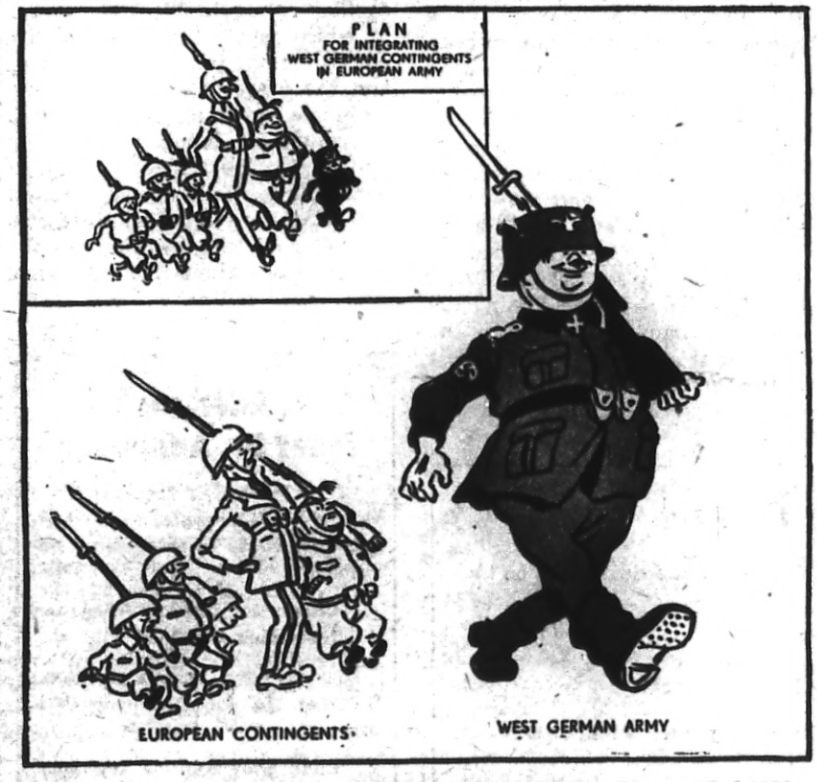
The open letter of the Socialist Unity Party summarised the subjects which the representatives of the two German states could discuss, and upon which agreement could be reached. These would include:

1. The renunciation of the use of force by both German states.
2. The establishment of an All-German Commission on the basis of parity.
3. The renunciation of nuclear and rocket weapons by both German states, and support for general and complete disarmament.
4. The drafting of German proposals for a peace treaty.
5. Bringing the two parts of Germany nearer to each other by means of economic and cultural cooperation.

(cont. on next page)

PROPHETIC CARTOON



This cartoon was first published in GERMAN REPORT on January 22nd 1954, when the rearmament of West Germany was only in the discussion stage. Today, as the cartoon predicted, the West German Wehrmacht is the largest army in western Europe.

(cont. from front page)

OPEN LETTER TO W. GERMAN WORKERS

The open letter of the Socialist Unity Party dealt in considerable detail with various aspects of the German problem, with particular reference to the Summit Conference opening in Paris on May 16th. Here, in summarised form, are some of the points made:

A Peace Treaty for Germany

The conclusion of a peace treaty with Germany would liquidate the matters left unsolved since the conclusion of World War Two, would end German militarism, and help produce suitable conditions for German reunification. For this reason the Government of the GDR has suggested that the two German states should send a joint peace-treaty delegation to the Summit Conference.

If the western powers should refuse to sign a peace treaty with both German states, because this would mean appending their signatures to a document also signed by the GDR, then special measures could be taken. One peace treaty could be worked out, and those states of the anti-Hitler coalition which wished to do so could sign the treaty with the GDR, and those which wished to do so could sign the treaty with West Germany. If the western powers and West Germany refused to consider the conclusion of a peace treaty, then a separate peace treaty would be signed by the GDR with those states of the anti-Hitler coalition which wished to participate; this would only be if all other possibilities had failed, since the signature of a separate peace treaty by the GDR would considerably complicate the solution of the German question as a whole.

The West Berlin Question

All the Great Powers have recognised that the situation of West Berlin is abnormal. West Berlin lies in the centre of the GDR, and legally it forms part of the territory of the GDR, but in the interests of understanding the Government of the GDR is ready to accept a compromise in the form of the creation of a demilitarised West Berlin Free City. The people of West Berlin would be able to choose freely their social system, and the communications of West Berlin with both East and West would be guaranteed.

The authorities of the GDR recognise, however, that certain questions of prestige make difficult, at the moment, this sensible solution of the West Berlin problem. In order to get round this difficulty, the GDR would be prepared to accept an interim solution: this interim solution would entail such conditions being created in West Berlin that it could no longer serve as a basis for sabotage and war provocation against the GDR and the other socialist countries. No nuclear weapons could be stationed in West Berlin, West Berlin citizens would be barred from joining the West German Wehrmacht, the western troops stationed in West Berlin would have to be gradually reduced in strength, and the "occupation statute" under which West Berlin is governed would have to be cancelled step by step.

The Social System in the Two German States

The GDR has no intention of imposing socialism upon West Germany, although the people of the GDR know that socialism is far superior to capitalism. In the years to come this superiority will become ever more clearly visible in Germany. The GDR is sure that sooner or later the workers of West Germany will take the correct decision on the social system to be established in West Germany.

Some workers in West Germany object that the GDR has a different conception of democracy from that ruling in West Germany. In the GDR democracy is judged by who rules in the state and in the economy, and what advantages are derived by the broad masses of the people. The GDR does not think much of a democracy, such as that ruling in West Germany, in which seven thousand millionaires own the factories, the mines, and the big estates, and thereby dominate the state, the army, and the whole of home and foreign policy. In the GDR, a socialist democracy, the factories, mines and estates are in the hands of the people, and the working people run the state, the army, and home and foreign policy.

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Dr. Adenauer – Meet Dr. Adenauer

"The Federal (West German) Government tolerates no dyed-in-the-wool Nazis in responsible positions."

Chancellor Konrad Adenauer, November 15th 1959

"Oberlaender was a National Socialist. In fact, he was dark brown."

Chancellor Konrad Adenauer, April 12th 1960

(for more about Oberlaender, see p. 67)

The Trial of Oberlaender (Part I)

Theodor Oberlaender, Refugee Minister in West Germany, went on trial before the Supreme Court of Democratic Germany on April 20th, but only in absentia. As expected, he had ignored the court summons to appear. He was therefore tried as a "fugitive from justice".

In his indictment, the State Prosecutor said: "the accused Oberlaender played an important part in supporting the fascist policy of aggression, of destroying and enslaving the peoples of eastern Europe through ideological, psychological, subversive and also pogrom methods and thus took part in destroying the lives of innumerable people.

"In the so-called Institute of East European Economy and as the national leader of the 'League of Germans in the East' and 'Gau-amtsleiter' of the National Socialist Party in the former province of East Prussia, he incited . . . the Germans living in neighbouring east European states in the spirit of fascism. He organised them into political and subversive organisations against sovereign states and their peaceful inhabitants."

The indictment charged that Oberlaender led the "Nightingale" Battalion in Lvov in June and July 1941, just after its occupation, and that he was responsible for the murder of countless Jewish citizens and a group of leading Polish scientists.

Later, Oberlaender had gone to camps of Soviet prisoners of war and selected soldiers for his new "Bergmann" (Mountaineer) battalion, it was charged. The prisoners were offered the choice of serving the Germans against Soviet troops or being shot. He went with this battalion to the Caucasus area, where he was again known for his cruelty. Evidence would be presented that Oberlaender personally shot 15 Soviet prisoners after severely mishandling one of them, a young woman teacher.

Other details established on the first day of the trial were that Oberlaender had taken part in the Hitler putsch attempt in Munich in 1933. After 1945 he had been officially "denazified" in Bavaria on the basis of difficulties with other nazi leaders. The prosecutor cited evidence that these difficulties had been only personal quarrels and differences and had not resulted in any disadvantages for Oberlaender, who held a wide variety of important positions till the last day of the war.

The two court-appointed defence lawyers raised the question of whether a GDR court was qualified in trying Oberlaender, a West German citizen. The judges answered that not only had Oberlaender been born and made his home till 1945 in towns belonging to the present GDR, but the crimes with which he had been charged had been organised in many parts of pre-1945 Germany, and the GDR was one of the two legal German states which succeeded the old German Reich and therefore had a right to try offences committed on its territory before its founding.

On April 22nd, the court heard witnesses who had been in Lvov during the massacres in 1941 describe what they had seen.

Mrs Helena Kuchar from Poland stated under oath that she had seen Oberlaender himself in a group of officers which had taken part in murdering a group of Polish scientists.

Mr M. Reiss, now living in Tel Aviv, told how he had been able to escape from a group of 8000 Jews rounded up by the invading troops. He had been present when they had been forced to crawl for hours on the ground and when one group of 75 had been killed.

Then another witness, Schpidal, a Ukrainian, told how he himself had been a member of the "Nightingale Battalion" under Oberlaender's command. He described how Jews had been forced to run the gauntlet. The survivors had been thrown out of a tower window.

A witness named Melnik, today a doctor in Lvov, had also been misled into joining the "Nightingale" outfit when still very young. He told how Oberlaender had told the assembled "Nightingales" on July 6th or 7th 1941: "The battalion has fulfilled its duties in Lvov just as we had expected."

The trial was still continuing as GERMAN REPORT went to press.

SINISTER MINISTER

October 20th 1953: Theodor Oberlaender was appointed Refugee Minister in the West German Cabinet.

November 13th 1953: GERMAN REPORT reported, as first English-language newspaper, on Oberlaender's nazi record.

January 17th 1954: The "New York Times" confirmed that Oberlaender joined the Nazi Party in 1933, that "he eventually received an honorary rank, roughly equivalent to that of captain in the brown-shirted SA — the Storm Troops of the Nazis. He also became Reichsfuehrer of the Federation of the German East. The federation was later classified by the Allies as a Nazi organisation."

September 26th 1959: West German weekly "Die Tat" exposed that Oberlaender led Nightingale Battalion, responsible for mass murders in Lvov, 1941. He obtained a court order confiscating all copies of the issue.

October 22nd 1959: Press conference in East Berlin published proofs that Oberlaender took part in Hitler's 1923 putsch attempt in Munich, had led 5th Column work for the nazis, etc.

November 4th 1959: Social Democratic Party (West Germany) called for Oberlaender's resignation.

April 5th 1960: Social Democratic fraction in West German Parliament demanded a parliamentary investigating committee on Oberlaender's crimes.

April 8th 1960: Oberlaender went on holiday; SPD backed down on demand for parliamentary investigation on condition that he resign before May 5th. (Oberlaender becomes entitled to £ 3000 annual pension for life on May 1st if still in office.)

April 13th 1960: Robert Pferdmenges, chairman of Christian Democrats' "Honour Council" to study Oberlaender case, reported finding "no evidence against Oberlaender which prejudiced his remaining as a member of Christian Democratic fraction in Parliament". Pferdmenges, leading banker and Adenauer friend, was himself on war criminal list.

April 20th 1960: Trial of Oberlaender — in absentia — on charges of war crimes began in Supreme Court of the German Democratic Republic in East Berlin.

April 21st 1960: Oberlaender decided not to resign until a parliamentary investigating committee was set up to clear his name.

April 22nd 1960: Oberlaender went to Caux, Switzerland, for a "Moral Rearmament" meeting.

"Peace Trial" Ends

The five-month trial of leading members of the West German Peace Committee ended on April 8th in Dusseldorf with a sentence of guilty for all six defendants.

Most of the Peace Committee leaders were put on probation, but Walter Diehl, 32, a one-time theology student who had become active in the international student movement and the peace movement, will have to serve out his sentence of a year; another defendant, Erich Kompalla, also 32, will be imprisoned for six weeks.

The defendants were found guilty of vague charges of "attempting to overthrow the Federal Republic" by such activities as opposing atomic arms. The prosecutors emphasised that the outlawed Communist Party was also against atomic arms.

The Peace Committee members must pay all court costs, which are estimated to range up to 500,000 marks (over £ 40,000).

The trial was part of a campaign directed against the West German Peace Committee and aimed at its destruction. On March 3rd 1959, its offices in numerous cities were raided by the police who searched them, seized card indexes, files and literature, and then padlocked the doors.

One day before the decision in Dusseldorf, a West Berlin court had sentenced Klaus Walter, 20, a student of West Berlin, to two months jail for pasting a poster on a wall which showed Adenauer weeping crocodile tears while his aides Theodor Oberlaender and Hans Globke painted swastikas and "Juden raus" slogans on the wall.

Walter was freed despite the guilty verdict, however, since he had already served two months in jail before the trial began.

Public protests from many countries, and approximately 300,000 signatures protesting the arrest of Klaus Walter, were believed to have saved the defendants in both trials from more severe sentences.

MAY DAY VISITORS

Trade unionists and other visitors from more than 50 countries arrived in Berlin shortly before May Day as guests of the Free German Trade Union Federation. They will watch the traditional demonstration on the Marx-Engels Platz in East Berlin and then visit other parts of Democratic Germany.

Among the visitors are delegations and individuals from Chile, the USA, Britain, Brazil and many newly-independent or not yet independent countries in Africa such as Somalia and Portuguese Guinea.

"NAKED AMONGST WOLVES"

Gripping Book, TV Play

A scene from "Naked Amongst Wolves", a gripping play about Buchenwald Concentration Camp broadcast by the TV Service of the German Democratic Republic on April 10th, the 15th anniversary of the day when the surviving prisoners freed themselves and took over the camp, several hours before liberation of the area by American troops.

The play was based upon the novel of the same name by Bruno Apitz, German anti-fascist who was imprisoned in the camp for many years. It tells the true story of a Jewish child in the camp, who was saved from death by the devotion of prisoners from many nations.

The novel, biggest best-seller in the German Democratic Republic in recent years, will be published later this year in English translation by Seven Seas Books, English-language publishing house of the GDR. A film of the novel is also scheduled.

The story of Buchenwald – both the cruelty of the nazis and the heroism of the inmates – has become especially well-known in the GDR thanks to the nation-wide campaign to build a large memorial there. The memorial, completed in September 1958, was the site of the main meeting to celebrate the 15th anniversary of liberation. 60,000 people were present, including delegations of ex-prisoners from many European countries.

DEPARTMENT OF INTERESTING COINCIDENCES

Decisions . . .

June 28th 1919: "Conscription in Germany will be abolished." "Submarines . . . are forbidden."

"Germany may not maintain either an army or navy air force."

Versailles Treaty

August 2nd 1945: "All German land, naval, and air forces . . . military schools, war veterans' organisations, . . . all clubs and associations which serve to keep alive the military tradition in Germany, shall be completely and finally abolished . . .

"The maintenance and production of all aircraft and all arms, ammunition, and implements of war shall be prevented." **Potsdam Agreement**

. . . violated:

March 13th 1935: The German Air Ministry informed the Air Attachés of Great Britain, Italy and France that Germany admitted the possession of military and naval aeroplanes. The violation of the military clauses of the Treaty of Versailles was justified on the grounds that since the former Allies refused to conform to their obligations there was nothing left for the Reich to do but to take its own measures for rearming.

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March 16th 1935: Hitler decreed compulsory military service for Germany.

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April 29th 1935: In the House of Commons, the Foreign Secretary was asked if he had been informed that the German Government had issued orders for the laying down of a number of submarine vessels, and for the reopening of the submarine school at Kiel; and if so, what steps he proposed to take in view of this further flagrant violation by the German Government of the Treaty of Versailles.

Sir John Simon said: "The German Government have intimated that orders have been given for the construction of twelve 250-ton submarines. The matter is now under consideration."

April 4th 1957: "Naturally, we cannot renounce the right of our troops to be equipped with the most modern conventional weapons. We do not possess the 'big' atomic arms. The whole development is in a state of flux and we Germans cannot stop it. All we can do is to adapt ourselves and to see to it that sometime, somewhere there will be a relaxation of tension."

Konrad Adenauer

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July 7th 1956: The West German Bundestag approved the introduction of military conscription.

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November 18th 1959: In the House of Commons Mr Emanuel Shinwell asked "whether Her Majesty's Government, as a member of the Western European Union, has now agreed to permit Western Germany to build submarines; and how many."

Foreign Secretary Selwyn Lloyd said: "No request for amendment to the provision of the Revised Brussels Treaty about German manufacture of submarines has been made . . . Under the terms of the Brussels Treaty, Western Germany was allowed to build submarines up to a tonnage of 350 tons."

Pledges . . .

June 18th 1935: "The German Government . . . undertake that, except in the circumstances indicated . . ., Germany's submarine tonnage shall not exceed 45 % of the total of that possessed by the members of the British Commonwealth of Nations.

"... That the future strength of the German navy in relation to the aggregate naval strength of the members of the British Commonwealth of Nations should be in the proportion of 35:100 . . ."

Anglo-German Naval Agreement

October 20—23rd 1954: ". . . the Federal Republic undertakes not to manufacture in its territory any atomic weapons, chemical weapons or biological weapons . . . that it undertakes further not to manufacture in its territory . . . long-range missiles . . . influence mines . . . warships of more than 3,000 tons displacement . . . submarines of more than 350 tons displacement . . . bomber aircraft for strategic purposes."

Documents Agreed on by the Conference of Ministers at Paris (Revision of the Brussels Treaty)

. . . broken

December 30th 1938: The German Government notified H. M. Government of their intention to exercise their rights under the Naval Agreements of 1935 and 1937 by which in special circumstances they might increase their ratio of submarines and "Class A" cruisers.

March 25th 1958: The West German Bundestag voted to authorise the use of nuclear weapons by the West German armed forces . . . The Defence Committee approved the purchase of 24 Matador missiles and six mobile launching ramps.

April 28th 1939: "Since England today upholds the view ... that Germany should be opposed under all circumstances and confirms this with its policy of encirclement, the basis for the Naval Treaty has been removed. I have therefore resolved today to send a communique to this effect to the British Government."

Adolf Hitler

December 3rd 1959: The General Assembly of the Western European Union, meeting in Paris, recommended that the Paris Treaties of 1954 should be amended, permitting West Germany to build warships of up to 6000 tons (double previous limit) and U-boats of up to 1000 tons (3 times previous limit). The Assembly also recommended that West Germany be allowed to develop its own naval surface-to-air and surface-to-surface missiles and influence mines, all of which were banned by the Paris Treaties.

The same friends ...

September 7th 1938: Dr Goebbels announced the 1938 awards of the national prizes created by Hitler. The third prize was divided between the leading aircraft constructors, Herr Willi Messerschmitt and Professor Ernst Heinkel.

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June 6th 1939: Legionaries of the German "Kondor" division who fought for General Franco staged a "victory parade" in Berlin which was reviewed by Herr Hitler. In his speech Hitler described how at the end of July 1936 he had decided to accede to the request of General Franco for help in order to save Spain from "the fire of a revolution fanned by International forces".

October 14th 1959: "The bulk of the West German Air Forces F 104's (multi-purpose fighter aircraft) — up to 300 — will be built on licence by Heinkel-Messerschmitt, a temporary combination of the companies that built Germany's World War II air fleet."

"New York Times"

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May 25th 1954: "Members of the former Kondor Legion who fought in Spain continued to be professional members of the Wehrmacht during this period, and are therefore justified in demanding that this period of service be taken into consideration when their pensions are granted."

Gerhard Schroeder, West German Minister of the Interior

... and enemies

February 24th 1933: The Karl Liebknecht House in Berlin, headquarters of the Communist Party, was taken over by the nazis. Communist newspapers and demonstrations had already been forbidden by Goering on February 2nd. Leaders of the party were rounded up on February 27th and 28th.

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November 29th 1935: "Germany is the bulwark of the West against Bolshevism, and, in combatting it, will meet terror with terror and violence with violence." **Adolf Hitler**

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February 22nd 1938: "Germany also has no quarrel with England apart from her colonial wishes. The only thing which has poisoned the relations of these two countries ... is an utterly unendurable Press campaign ... it could easily come to pass that ... the contemptible international lie-mongers should generate a violent hatred against our country ..."

Adolf Hitler

August 17th 1956: The West German Constitutional Court banned the Communist Party, and the offices of the party in Dusseldorf, Munich, Nuremberg, Dortmund, Karlsruhe and other cities as well as 13 Communist newspapers were raided and sealed. A number of individual Communists were arrested.

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November 15th 1956: "We are living in a technical age in which the combined strength of our allies is sufficient to wipe the Soviet Union off the map."

Franz Josef Strauss, West German Defence Minister

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April 8th 1959: "I have sometimes asked myself if there are wire-pullers somewhere who deliberately try ... to impair relations between the British people and the German people. Unfortunately, for some considerable time ... the atmosphere in Britain towards Germany has been, one might almost say, systematically impaired."

Konrad Adenauer

Manoeuvres in Bavaria ...

August 13rd 1938: The largest manoeuvres ever undertaken by the German Army in peace-time commenced. The comprehensive nature of the manoeuvres gave rise to considerable comment and, in certain circles, some nervousness. The main centres chosen for the manoeuvres were Bavaria and Saxony, on the Czechoslovak border, and on the left bank of the Rhine.

February 10th and 11th 1960: "The new West German Army flexed its growing muscles in Exercise Wintershield and found both strengths and weaknesses ... the Bavarian winter exercises, the largest United States-German joint maneuver yet held ... showed that the new German Army still has some major problems. But it has some extremely capable commanders and noncoms, and the seeds of its past military greatness are sprouting again."

Hanson Baldwin, in the "New York Times"

. . . Lebensraum in the East

September 12th, 1938: "The misery of the Sudeten Germans (in Czechoslovakia) is without end ... They are being oppressed in an inhuman and intolerable manner and treated in an undignified way ... This is not a matter of indifference to us, and I say that if these tortured creatures cannot obtain rights and assistance by themselves they can obtain both from us."

Adolf Hitler

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August 26th 1939: "I have therefore raised a clear demand. Danzig and the (Polish) Corridor must return to Germany ... I see no way of being able to persuade Poland, which shields itself from attack under the protection of its guarantees, to accept a peaceful solution."

Adolf Hitler

"The German East includes not only the Elbe and the Oder, but also Bohemia and all areas where Germans once settled."

West German Minister Hans-Christian Seebohm August 1953 in a magazine article

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June 28th 1959: In a speech to a rally of a quarter of a million Germans who once lived in Silesia, today a part of Poland, Chancellor Konrad Adenauer stated that normal relations with Poland could only be established when West German territorial claims had been satisfied.

Old Soldiers Never Die . . .

March 17th 1935: "We Germans want no revenge, for in the four years of the Great War we reaped glory enough for coming centuries. We believe in the possibility of establishing a new order in Europe and the world by peaceful means ..."

General von Blomberg, Minister of Defence

March 14th 1954: "There must be a continuity of tradition between the German soldiers of World War II and the German soldiers of the future. The duties the future soldier will face will be the same as those faced by the older generation of soldiers."

Franz Josef Strauss, present West German Defence Minister

Gott mit uns . . .

March 16th 1935: "The Government of present-day Germany, however, wishes only one moral and material power – the power to preserve peace for Germany, and thereby for all Europe ..."

Nazi Government Proclamation

January 22nd 1960: "I think that God has given the German people a special task in these stormy times – to be a guardian for the West against those powerful influences which are brought to bear on us from the East."

Konrad Adenauer at an audience with the Pope

What to expect

February 12th 1937: "When we were through with our armaments we tore up the central Treaty of Versailles and threw it in the face of our opponents."

Dr Josef Goebbels

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All Farmers Join

All farmers in the German Democratic Republic had joined collective farms by April 15th, when the 14th and last county, Karl Marx Stadt, announced that it had completed 100% collectivisation. Karl Marx Stadt County followed Suhl, Halle and Dresden Counties in the rapid change-over to large-scale agriculture, which had begun during the winter months in the north of the country and moved steadily southwards.

Farmers either joined existing collective farms – the first of which had been founded in 1952 – or where there was none in their village, they started a new collective, or agricultural production cooperative, as they are called in the GDR.

The main advantage of the cooperatives is that the large fields permit full use of modern machinery, that cattle, hogs and poultry can be bred on a large-scale, scientific basis, and that the farmers and their families will have less back-breaking work and a great deal more free time.

W. Germans to Togo?

West German troops should be sent to West Africa to "defend the independence" of Togo, the Bonn newspaper "General-Anzeiger" suggested on April 14th. Togo, which became independent at the end of April this year, was a German colony before World War One.

The newspaper quoted unnamed "political sources" in Lome, the capital of Togo, as stating that the young African country desired foreign military help in guarding its frontiers. "Political circles in Lome have expressed the wish that some form of defence agreement should be concluded with the German Federal Republic," the paper stated.

"Political developments after April 27th (Independence Day) will show whether a German guarantee for the protection of the frontiers of Togo is necessary and practicable. The people of Togo recall the protection which they received from the Kaiser's Reich from 1884 until the outbreak of World War One."

BERLIN NOTEBOOK

By John Peet

Do you remember the case of the "Altmark"? This was a floating nazi jail, on which 300 British merchant seamen were confined under terrible conditions after being captured by German marauders in the early stages of World War Two. On February 17th 1940, as the Altmark was sneaking its way down the Norwegian coast on its way to a German port, H. M. S. Cossack intercepted the boat and freed the prisoners after a sharp fight.

The nazi propagandists immediately went into paroxysms of rage. "Churchill's navy makes a cowardly attack on an unarmed German merchant ship" howled Hitler's radio, ignoring the fact that the Altmark was an armed naval auxiliary vessel.

The nazi propaganda yells did not go down very well, even in the United States, which was still neutral at that time. The "New York Herald Tribune" commented:

"There is a good deal of grim humour in the wild cries of anger, pain and outraged moral virtue being sent up from Berlin. A nation whose governors have made armed force their deity, who have butchered the Polish civilian population without compunction, who have torpedoed crowded liners without warning, have had the tables turned on them in a relatively minor way. And they suddenly shriek to high heaven about this 'criminal' inversion of the natural order."

Now why have I disinterred this relatively unimportant episode from the early stages of World War Two? The reason is that in the past few weeks people in West Germany have been reading once again the old nazi propaganda story that the liberation of the British prisoners on the Altmark was a "cowardly attack". This is one of the items in a tabulation of events during the Second World War, printed in one of the recent weekly numbers of a series of cheap paper-bound booklets entitled "Der Landser" — "The Soldier".

Here are a couple of extracts from the "documentary section" of volume 88 in the series:

"February 3rd 1940: Successful German air attacks on British merchant vessels.

February 14th: German U-boats sink in one day 58,000 tons of enemy shipping.

February 16th: Gross breach of neutrality by the British: cowardly attack on the German steamer Altmark."

Now you may think that this bit of very nazi history is only printed in some hole-in-the-corner magazine of no real importance. Unfortunately this is not the case. Most news-stands in West Germany and West Berlin prominently display the cheap and gaudy booklets of the "Landser" series, each one of which tells the "heroic" story of the exploits of nazi soldiers on one of the fronts of the Second World War. At the little news-stand in West Berlin where I picked up a few copies this week, there were twenty different titles on display, and the salesman told me that he sold about 100 copies every week, mostly to teen-age boys. Further enquiries showed that the total print of the "Landser" booklets runs to about 500,000 every month.

Let us have a look at their "literary" contents. In the line of duty, and not for pleasure, I have ploughed through half-a-dozen copies, and here is my report:

"Ardennes 1944 — The Last Great German Offensive in the West". This is an account of the nazi last-ditch offensive in December 1944, which was marked by the extensive slaughter of American POWs by SS troops. The book fails to mention these murders, but contains many passages like this:

"Heinz Bunzmann had volunteered for the Waffen SS. He was attracted by the fine closely-fitting uniforms which they wore ... The officers (of the SS) were in the great majority really decent men."

The booklet repeatedly speaks in terms of the highest praise of SS General Sepp Dietrich, who was sentenced to a 25 years sentence for war crimes by an American court after the war.

The real sting comes on the last page of the book, when the hero visits the battlefield in the Ardennes today, accompanied by his son, and says to him:

"Never forget the men who fell here ... They all fell true to their soldiers' oath. They obeyed orders, and we must honour such conduct."

Just incidentally, the cover of the booklet carries a bloodthirsty picture, in full colour, of a heroic German soldier lobbing a grenade at two rather sub-human GIs. And this number prints a significant reader's letter:

"We are a group of young workers in Herne. Many thanks for your book series. There have been enough murky characters who have earned their living for 15 years by dragging Germany in the dirt ..."

Booklet No. 2 is entitled: "Behind the Front Lines on the Northern Sector". This tells the story of a (heroic) nazi platoon cut off on the eastern front. On page 6 there is a graphic account, full of boisterous nazi humour, about how Russian civilians are forced to dig their own graves at the point of a rifle, and the episode is illustrated on page 7 with a line drawing. A few pages later one of the German soldiers beats up a group of Russians, spits at them, and then shoots them down in cold blood, just because he feels like it. One of the men shot is the village idiot. The nazi lieutenant in charge of the platoon finds this rather distasteful, but does nothing to interfere.

Our third specimen is one of the special monthly volumes giving the biographies of nazi officers who were decorated with the "Knight's Cross". The subject of this booklet is General Heinz Guderian, Hitler's tank expert.

The booklet gets off to a flying start with the introduction, stating: "We regard it as our task to keep alive the memory of the fight which our people put up for nearly six years against a world of enemies."

I will spare you an analysis of the body of the book, which consists of one long hymn of praise for this nazi general. The closing sentences may be interesting, however:

"On May 10th 1945 Guderian is captured by the Americans. He finishes his life as a soldier in various camps and in the so-called 'war-criminal' prison at Nuremberg. Then he returns to his wife. The most famous Panzer general of the last war writes a book about the situation of the German Federal Republic and warns once again against Bolshevism, and those organisations which do its subversive work in the West. Guderian does all he can for the rehabilitation of the German soldier. In 1954 he dies ..."

And remember that half a million copies of booklets like these are sold in West Germany and West Berlin every month.

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